



**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
Homeland Security Committee**

*Flying Blind: What are the risks of resuming U.S. commercial air service to Cuba?
May 17, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to start by thanking the gentleman from New York, Mr. Katko, for holding this important hearing today and for his leadership on aviation security. I believe that the issue of security at last points of departure airports is of critical importance to our homeland security.

I saw this firsthand earlier this month, when I led a Congressional delegation overseas to examine the spread of Islamist militant groups. I had the opportunity to visit Egypt and examine the security measures that were in place at the Cairo airport. The Egyptians are making progress, but what I saw was still concerning, especially when compared to our own airports. For instance, they are not using full-body scanners, and airport workers are apparently not fully vetted against up-to-date terror watchlists. Yet, the Cairo airport serves as a last point of departure to the United States.

Now the Administration is rushing to open regularly scheduled commercial air service to Cuba and designate ten new airports as last points of departure to the United States. I fear that the security situation at these airports in Cuba is much, much worse than places like Cairo. And while there only five direct flights to the U.S. each week from somewhere like Egypt, the Administration's proposal calls for up to 110 daily flights between the U.S. and Cuba. I hope to visit Cuba in the near future with Representative Katko and other members to evaluate the airport security situation for myself.

The Administration's plan to open direct commercial air service to Cuba is being unnecessarily rushed. There are serious security concerns here that seem to be taking a back seat to a legacy building effort. Although Cuba has taken steps to liberalize its economy in recent years, the country is still led by a communist dictator who has been ruthless against his own people and who has brutally suppressed calls for more open and democratic governance.

Restoring relations has done little to soften the Castro regime's hateful rhetoric toward the United States or to compel the government to loosen its tyrannical grip. In fact, it's done the opposite by rewarding bad behavior. And now the regime is giving us no indication that it is acting in good faith or has the best interests of the United States or our citizens in mind. Accordingly, we must do all we can to ensure the safety and security of Americans that choose to visit the island, and so far I remain entirely unconvinced the Administration has done its due diligence.

While the Obama Administration may be willing to put the security of Americans at risk to appease a dictator, today's hearing will show that the United States Congress will not.

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